

UNSUNG HEROES
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SPOKESMEN FOR KIDS

It was not the dirt on the bike that was unusual, although it was excessive. It was the grass and twigs packed into the hubs of the wheels causing the man's eyebrows to rise. He was manning one of the maintenance stations at a local elementary school "bicycle day." When asked about the bike's condition, the little boy who owned it proudly replied, "This here's a dirt bike, mister."

Every year, a local service club hosts this event for the school. Students bring their bikes to participate in a variety of activities. A local officer in the club mans a station to discuss rules of the road. Sometimes he lets the kids sit in his squad car. Businessmen staff maintenance stations to show children how to inflate tires, adjust seats and handlebars, tighten and align wheels, and adjust brakes. Reflectors are installed there as well. Some members conduct a multi-event bicycle skills rodeo, for which prizes are awarded in a ceremony. There is a bike safety poster competition for which prizes are also distributed. And by the way, every third grader receives a bicycle helmet. Each is adjusted for fit.

Year after year, the club hosts this event. Year after year, more children receive equipment and knowledge to make bicycle riding more of a joy and less of a danger. The event does not take long. Not counting preparation time, members donate about three or four hours. The memories last much longer. Though tired, most who participate will be there next time if at all possible.

The follow up scene is sometime later in a local department store. As the man enters, a somewhat familiar little boy breaks away from his parents to run and hug the man's knees. They are both smiling, though the man is a little unsure which student this boy might be. He is excited to tell the man all about his new bicycle, his new dirt bike. It is like the old one, but the wheels are a little straighter and the brakes work should they happen to be used.

When they are not used in time, at least the boy is now wearing a helmet.